



CT Community Providers Association
Caring for Connecticut

To: Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee

From: Morna Murray, President and CEO

Re: Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing on HB 5279, AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN CITIZENS OF CONNECTICUT

Date: February 27, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Morna Murray and I am the President and CEO of the Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA). CCPA represents community-based organizations that provide health and human services for children, adults, and families in multiple areas, including mental health, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities. Our members serve more than 500,000 people each year.

I am here today to speak on HB 5279, AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN CITIZENS OF CONNECTICUT.

This Act, while grounded in an ideal public policy that would require minimum wage for all individuals with disabilities, has serious unintended consequences for these citizens that are deeply concerning to CCPA and many advocates for disabilities around the state.

The country is, thankfully, moving toward the recognition of people with disabilities as equal citizens who should have the same choices any "typical" person has in life. Work offers so much – dignity, pride, independence, socializing, friends. Right now, 75-80% of people with disabilities are unemployed. There is no other group -- ethnic, minority or gender, that comes close to this statistic. This is horrendous. It is unacceptable.

That said, changing the minimum wage immediately for all individuals with disabilities would create negative and unintended consequences, which would be the opposite of the purpose of this bill. It would actually result in some people with disabilities losing the employment opportunities they have. That would be tragic. For a person with disabilities to lose what might very well be their most meaningful integration into society would be an incalculable loss for them – and for our society.

Let me be very clear. CCPA is not saying we should stay at sub-minimum wage. We need to move to a just society in which every person with a disability is recognized for the contribution he or she can make and is provided a just and equitable wage. But it must be a thoughtful and financed change. We cannot do this and lose anyone in the process.

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This issue has played out extensively at the federal level on the debate on Section 14(C) and there is a push to come up with creative solutions to gradually move toward minimum wage for people with disabilities in stages. Our own state system for citizens with developmental disabilities is undergoing a transformation that will involve many significant changes, including how we help people with disabilities find meaningful employment. For far too long, we have supported policies that lead to learned helplessness of individuals with disabilities. This is not integration. This is not equality. It is demeaning and it limits and segregates people with disabilities.

But all that cannot be wiped away by simply dropping the commensurate wage allowance. We would undo progress we have made. There must be a transition, and there must be funding for that transition. The Bureau of Rehabilitative Services and the Department of Education have roles to play as well, because data shows that teens with disabilities who work are far more likely to work as adults. This is a highly interrelated and complex issue.

There is no question this bill is the right ideal, but it must be implemented over a period of time so that no one with a disability loses his or her job. Alternatively, if done immediately, we would require state funding to ensure that no person with a disability loses employment.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have or provide any additional information.